

Data for Social Good



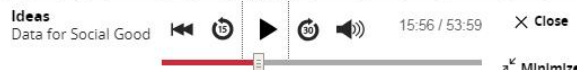
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How can we harness the power of data to build a better world? (Pixabay)

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Data is a hot topic. We hear a lot about how it's being gathered and then sold and used for nefarious purposes. We read about how data collecting is used to create targeted political ads that skew debate and create fear. We worry about who's selling our data and whether our governments can keep our data secure.

But there's another friendlier side to data: publicly available data can also be used for social good. In places like Mexico and Palestine and Bahamas, publicly available data is being used to help those who aren't in a position to effect change, whether they be civilians caught in the middle of a civil war, or poor children with no outdoor space to play.

More and more, researchers, academics, NGOs, and journalists are using data to build comprehensive pictures of events on the ground. They can create a 3D image of a given event or try to understand trends leading up to political or environmental events.

In this episode, **Anik See** details several stories, including one from Mexico City where hundreds of thousands of little children find themselves with nowhere to play. Growing up in dense neighbourhoods thick with foot and road traffic, encroaching buildings, and poor planning, kids

ended up spending a good portion of their time indoors. Families were not out meeting each other. Neighbourhoods were not vibrant and dynamic social hubs.



One of the Laboratorio para la Ciudad urban creativity projects in Mexico City. (Laboratorio para la Ciudad)

But by digging deep into the publicly available data and figuring out which of Mexico City's densest neighbourhoods had the highest number of children and the least amount of green space per child, [Laboratorio para la Ciudad](#) was able to target specific parts of the city with programs that would shut down local streets for a few hours at a time and let the kids come out to play. With the kids came the parents and where families gathered, food and music were sure to follow.

But urban revitalization isn't the only way that users of public data are changing things. Open-source investigators like [bellingcat](#) and [Forensic Architecture](#) dig deep into vast troves of data to provide counter-narratives to events like the downing of flight MH17 in Ukraine, and civilian deaths in Gaza from Israeli bombardment. The organization [Sea Around Us](#) uses open data to track fisheries, ecosystems, and biodiversity by looking closely at fishing — both private and industrial — around the world.

Contributor Anik See explores the world of publicly available data and asks the question: how can we harness the power of data to build a better world?

[Anik See](#) is a Canadian writer and radio producer living in The Netherlands. She has published

three books, and has contributed to many publications and magazines, such as National Geographic, The Walrus, Brick, Geist, The National Post, and Toronto Life.

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